



U.S. Department of Justice

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Justice and Education Departments Commemorate Sexual Assault Awareness Month at Event With Students at Banneker High School - Principal Assistant U.S. Attorney Vincent H. Cohen Jr. Addresses Students -**

WASHINGTON – Wrapping up a month’s worth of events in recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, the Departments of Justice and Education participated in a town hall-style event today at Benjamin Banneker Academic High School in Washington, D.C.

Principal Assistant U.S. Attorney Vincent H. Cohen Jr. was among those taking part in a discussion with the school’s student body about healthy relationships, sexual assault prevention, early intervention, and resources available to assault victims. Also appearing were: Associate Attorney General Tom Perrelli, Susan B. Carbon, Director for the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW); Sunil H. Mansukhani, Deputy Secretary for Policy at the Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights, and local resource providers.

President Obama first proclaimed April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month in 2009, urging Americans to support victims and to work together to prevent these crimes in our communities. At Banneker today, more than 400 students engaged in the lively question-and-answer session with department officials, Neil Irvin of Men Can Stop Rape, Tonya Turner of Break The Cycle, and Melinda Coles of the D.C. Rape Crisis Center.

“The U.S. Attorney’s Office is committed to responding with compassionate understanding to victims of sexual assault and to holding offenders accountable for their crimes,” said Principal Assistant U.S. Attorney Cohen. “We will meet that challenge by working along with our partners in law enforcement, health care providers and non-profit organizations.”

“We at the Justice Department share a vision of a world where women, men, girls, boys and communities live without fear of sexual violence,” said Associate Attorney General Tom Perrelli. “I am honored to be here today with a thoughtful and engaged set of students, because it’s never too early to begin a dialogue about these issues and work to find solutions.”

“Sexual Assault Awareness Month provides an important focus for recognizing that we can all be agents of social change and end sexual violence,” said Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) Director Carbon. “In the 16 years since the Violence Against Women Act was signed into law, we have been able to equip communities with the resources to save lives and protect survivors. This month’s theme encourages everyone to get involved, take action, and support the ongoing work done in the field of sexual assault—and we hope to impress that same message upon the students here at Banneker High School.”

Throughout April, Director Carbon and members of the department’s OVW team have visited nine states to discuss sexual assault prevention and awareness. During these visits OVW spoke with members of the military, student groups, advocates, elected officials, and community members about the importance of getting involved in stopping these crimes and supporting the work of those in the field who are working to transform the lives of survivors.

The Justice Department’s 2006 National Violence Against Women Survey found that nearly 18 million women and 3 million men had experienced a sexual assault. In 2008, according to the department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics, 57 percent of the sexual assaults against females were committed by an offender whom they knew, and one in five sexual assaults against females (20 percent) was committed by an intimate partner. Less than half (47 percent) of the sexual assaults against females in 2008 were reported to police. Young women ages 16 to 24 are at greatest risk, and an alarming number of young women are sexually assaulted while in college. One National Institute of Justice study found that one in four women will be raped over the course of their college career.

OVW provides leadership in developing the nation’s capacity to reduce violence against women through the implementation of VAWA and subsequent legislation. Created in 1995, OVW administers financial and technical assistance to communities across the country that are developing programs, policies and practices aimed at ending domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking. For more information, please visit [www.ovw.usdoj.gov](http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov).